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November 5, 2003

On Veterans Day, correct the erosion of veterans' burial benefits!

Dear Colleague,

As Veterans Day approaches, we remember and honor the selfless sacrifices veterans have made for our nation. As veterans from previous wars age and countless national heroes continue to fight for our freedoms, paying for the burial expenses of veterans is a growing concern for many families and state veteran cemeteries.

AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Veterans of Foreign Wars all say "veterans' burial benefits have seriously eroded" and left states and families to supplement the cost.

- In 1973, the burial allowance for veterans with service connected injury covered 72% of funeral costs. Now, the benefit covers only 39% of the funeral costs.
- In 1973, the burial allowance for a veteran without a service connected injury covered 22% of funeral costs. Now, the benefit covers only 6% of funeral costs.
- In 1973, the plot allowance for a veteran buried in a state cemetery reimbursed a state cemetery at 13% of the costs. Now, the benefit covers only 6% of funeral costs.

The Veterans Burial Benefits Improvement Act of 2003, H.R. 2217, will correct this oversight by increasing the benefits to cover the same percentage of veterans' burial costs that they covered in 1973 when they were initiated.

I encourage you to support this important improvement to veterans benefits. Please find a letter from AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Paralyzed Veterans of America, and Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States in support of H.R. 2217 on the other side. For more information, or to cosponsor H.R. 2217, please contact me or Shannon von Felden of my staff at 225-5965.

Sincerely,

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SHELLEY BERKLEY
Member of Congress